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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001759

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2016

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: TAMIL TIGERS GOING TO GENEVA TALKS
BECAUSE OF CO-CHAIR EFFORTS

REF: A) COLOMBO 1752 B) COLOMBO 1755 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On October 18-20, nearly simultaneous visits by Assistant Secretary Boucher (ref a), Japanese peace envoy Akashi, and the Norwegian facilitator Hanssen-Bauer helped nudge both the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers toward opening a new chapter of negotiations on October 28-29. Hanssen-Bauer told Boucher that the Tigers had decided on going to Geneva in deference to the international community's setting out a framework for talks in the Co-Chairs' September 12 Brussels statement. The Tamil Tigers would want to focus on humanitarian issues, alleged Sri Lankan violations of human rights and reviving the moribund Ceasefire Agreement. In contrast, the government wanted to move on to core issues of a political settlement. Hanssen-Bauer said he would set limited objectives for the first round, hoping to get agreement on a series of subsequent meetings, including dates, venues and agendas. End summary.

12. (C) Norwegian Special Envoy Jon Hanssen-Bauer briefed visiting Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher on October 20 about the status of his facilitation efforts in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict and the prospects for launching a new round of talks in Geneva on October 28-29. Hanssen-Bauer reported that Tamil Tiger chief negotiator Tamilchelvan told him October 19 that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were prepared to go to Geneva despite the presence of "negative factors," including the government's "resumption of offensive operations."

13. (C) According to Tamilchelvan, Hanssen-Bauer said, Tamil Tiger supremo Prabhakaran had decided to return to the table because the Tigers approved of the Co-chairs September 12 statement issued from Brussels. The Tigers appreciated that the Co-chairs had placed conditions on both sides in order to keep the process moving. Most significantly, Tamilchelvan had confirmed to him that the Tigers understood that the talks were about devolution or autonomy - and not about a separate Tamil state in the northeast.

¶4. (C) Hanssen-Bauer said that Tamilchelvam had complained of a worsening humanitarian situation in Jaffna, where the population was running short of basic foods and medicines. The Tigers would bring up the provisioning of Jaffna with humanitarian supplies, and particularly wanted the government of Sri Lanka to re-open the A-9 highway linking Jaffna to the south. The Tigers also want the Government to cease aerial bombardment of targets in Tiger-held territory.

¶5. (C) Hanssen-Bauer said that he planned have the opening statements by the two sides in Geneva open to the press. This was to clamp down on the parties leaking conflicting versions of the negotiations to the media. Four closed sessions would follow. Hanssen-Bauer said that previous rounds had gotten bogged down in protracted agenda negotiations, which was counterproductive, so he had not set a specific agenda for this one. He was seeking to keep expectations low for the first meeting, but had a goal of setting a schedule for at least two more rounds with agreed dates, venue and objectives.

¶6. (C) Tamilchelvam had told him the Tigers would raise human rights and the fraying Ceasefire Agreement in addition to their humanitarian concerns. However, the government had signaled that it was no longer interested in trying to resuscitate the Agreement and wanted to move directly into core issues related to a political settlement. Hanssen-Bauer thought that the September Co-chairs statement provided an "inventory" of how talks should proceed. The parties must address the grievances of minority communities and take account of the concerns of Muslims as well as Tamils. The

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talks could not lead to a separate state.

¶7. (C) Charge and PolOff had received a very similar readout of Tiger intentions from Japanese Peace Envoy Yasushi Akashi. Akashi briefed us and Co-chair Ambassadors on his talks with Tamilchelvam in Kilinochchi on October 18. Akashi said the Tigers had committed to talks "in full respect of the wishes of the international community as represented by the Co-chairs Brussels statement." Akashi observed that he had never previously experienced such "deference" by the Tigers to the "common stance of the international community on the conflict."

¶8. (C) COMMENT: The Co-chairs statement of September 18 has developed into a seminal text for trying to resolve Sri Lanka's long-running conflict. In the context of recent military reverses suffered by both sides, and of a new accord between Sri Lanka's two major political parties (ref b), the October 28-29 meeting in Geneva will likely be the best opportunity for some time to take a fresh approach to the problem. The efforts of the three international envoys in the last few days appear to have materially increased the prospects that the meeting will take place. Fortunately, perhaps, neither of the parties to the conflict, nor the international community, has any expectations that this initial round will be highly productive. The Norwegian goal of agreement to two more rounds of talks with agreed dates, venues and objectives strikes us as sensible.

¶9. (SBU) Assistant Secretary Boucher cleared this message.
BLAKE